ABC NEWS

"CIA - ABU ZUBAYDAH"

INTERVIEW WITH JOHN KIRIAKOU

CORRESPONDENT: BRIAN ROSS

MEDIA ID: TAPE #1

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

BRIAN ROSS:

John, you were involved in the capture of Abu Zubaydah?

JOHN:

I was.

BRIAN ROSS:

And tell me about that, how it happened.

JOHN:

It was quite a long process. We had information that Abu Zubaydah was somewhere in Pakistan-- in either Fice (PH) Labodd (PH) or Lahore (PH). And we undertook a-- a week's long, month long-- investigation. We were able to narrow his location down to more than a dozen possibilities. And working with the Pakistani government and

with the FBI, we-- we raided each one of those sites and found him in one of the-- in one of the houses.

BRIAN ROSS:

And how were you able to focus in on where he was?

JOHN:

It was very difficult. But it was-- it was really a combination of-- of things. It was-- it was a wide variety of sources reporting on possibilities of where either he might be located or where-- others might be located who would know of his whereabouts.

We decided not to take the chance and-- and just hit one or two sites, fearing that-- word would get back to him, and he'd have a chance to-- to run off and-- and go deeper underground. So we elected to hit all the sites at the same time at-- the same night. And we're lucky enough that he was in one of them.

BRIAN ROSS:

And how many-- people did that involve? A big operation--

JOHN:

Yeah. Just on the American side it was about-- three dozen people. There were a lot of-- there were a lot of heroes that night. People worked hard and worked closely together. And it worked.

BRIAN ROSS:

And why were you-- focused on him?

JOHN:

We were told at the time, well, we had a lot of information Abu Zubaydah going back into the '90s. He was one of the financiers of the September 11th attacks. He was a-- a logistics chief-- of al Qaeda. And we knew that he was close to bin Laden, although not co-located obviously. We know that-- or we knew at the time that he had a line to bin Laden. And we thought that if we could capture him it would deal a significant blow to the al Qaeda leadership.

BRIAN ROSS:

And he was in Pakistan.

JOHN:

He was in Fice Labad, Pakistan. Correct.

BRIAN ROSS:

And how long had he been there?

JOHN:

We're not sure. It-- it seemed to us-- he admitted to having been there a week. We thought he was probably there more like two or three weeks.

BRIAN ROSS:

And when was this?

JOHN:

This was in March of 2002.

BRIAN ROSS:

So you'd been looking for him since September 11th essentially or--

JOHN:

We had. We had indeed.

BRIAN ROSS:

And-- when-- when the catch was made, when you

caught up with him, you hit the right place, what happened there? Did he resist?

JOHN:

He resisted. There was a shootout. The Pakistanis were the first-- inside the door. And he stabbed a Pakistani policeman in the neck. We feared at the time that he-- that he had died. Things were happening so quickly, it was confusing. And-- the Pakistani authorities told us initially that the man had died.

He turned out to just have been wounded. But then Abu Zubaydah-- went up to the roof of his house and tried to jump to the roof of the neighboring house. He exchanged in a-- in a gun battle with the Pakistani police down below, and he was shot three times. And then dropped from the roof of the house onto the ground. He was almost killed. And later that night one of the doctors, the Pakistani doctors who was treating him, told me that he had never seen wounds so severe where the patient had lived.

BRIAN ROSS:

And what happened to him after you caught up with him (UNINTEL)

JOHN:

Well, we took him to a hospital for-- for emergency-- treatment. The hospital in Fice Labad was-- was just a-- a terrible place. So we evacuated him to a military hospital in Lahore. And-- the Director of Central Intelligence, George Tenet, immediately got on the phone to Johns Hopkins University and asked if they could send a trauma surgeon to Pakistani. So that trauma surgeon got on a plane, a private plane, flew directly to the base. And-- I guess it was about 24 hours after the shooting-- he was able to begin treating Abu Zubaydah.

BRIAN ROSS:

And what was the nature of his wounds?

JOHN:

He was shot in the thigh, the groin, and the stomach with an AK-47.

BRIAN ROSS:

And barely survived.

JOHN:

Barely survived. One of the things that sticks in my mind-- from those-- those days and nights was how much blood he lost. There was blood everywhere. It was all over him. It was all over the bed. It pooled underneath the bed. It was all over us every time we had to move him. It was really an incredible amount of blood that he lost.

BRIAN ROSS:

And after you captured him what was your security like to keep him under-- lock and key?

JOHN:

(LAUGHS) The security was I tore up a sheet and tied him to the bed.

BRIAN ROSS:

You did?

JOHN:

Yeah. That was about all we could do in those initial hours. The idea was we wanted to get him

to a-- to a place where he would be safe, where he could recover from his wounds, and where we could begin interviewing him. But-- the idea was-- just to keep everybody not with us or his medical team away from him. And that's what we did. There was a group of nurses. And he had the Pakistani military doctor-- doing everything he could to help him. But otherwise it was me, and it was a small group of-- of CIA and FBI people who just kept 24/7 eyes on him.

BRIAN ROSS:

So you were in the room that whole time.

JOHN:

Yeah. In fact, I was the first person that spoke to him when he came out of his coma.

BRIAN ROSS:

And what'd you say?

JOHN:

He asked me-- well, first I went up to him, and I-- I asked him in Arabic what his name was. And he shook his head. And I asked him again in Arabic. And then he answered me in English. And

he said that he would not speak to me in God's language. And then I said, "That's okay. We know who you are."

And then he asked me to smother him with a pillow. And I said, "No, no. We have-- we have plans for you." And I encouraged him from the very beginning to cooperate and to tell us what he knew. Frankly there were lives at stake. And we knew that he was the biggest fish that we had caught. We knew he was full of information.

And-- and we wanted to get it. One of the reasons why it was of such-- importance to us that night is the room where-- where he was when the raid began had a table in it. And on the table Abu Zubaydah and two other men were building a bomb. The soldering arm was still hot. And they had the plans for-- for a school on the table. So we knew that there were-- immediate threats that he could-- he could help us with.

BRIAN ROSS:

A school where?

JOHN:

In Lahore. In Lahore, Pakistan.

BRIAN ROSS:

A Pakistani school.

JOHN:

We think it was the American school. Or the British school I guess it was. Not the American school.

BRIAN ROSS:

So you felt that he was-- he was very current. He knew what was going on.

JOHN:

Very current. On top of-- of the current threat information he-- he was so well tied into the al Qaeda leadership, and he was-- he was highly thought of in al Qaeda, and he was very, very good at logistics, that we knew that he knew everybody who was worth knowing in al Qaeda. He knew cell leaders.

He knew logistics people. He knew finance people. We knew that he was really one of the intellectual leaders of the group.

BRIAN ROSS:

And when you began to speak with him then did you-- revert to Arabic?

JOHN:

No. He would never speak to me in Arabic. And frankly he was very polite about it. We never exchanged a harsh word. He was a-- he was an interesting person to sit and have a conversation with. But he would never speak to me in Arabic. And his English was quite good.

BRIAN ROSS:

(UNINTEL)

JOHN:

It was fluent.

BRIAN ROSS:

He was fluent in English.

JOHN:

He was.

BRIAN ROSS:

And what was his demeanor?

JOHN:

He was a very-- (LAUGHS) it's-- it's funny to have to say it like this. But he was a very friendly guy. Later on he did things like he wrote poetry. Or he would debate-- the merits of Islam. Or he would wanna talk about the differences or similarities between Islam and Christianity.

He wanted to talk about current events. He-- he told us a couple of times that he had nothing personal, there was nothing personal against the United States. It was Israel that he wanted to fight. And that the United States was close to Israel. And we had been caught up in whatever it was that-- that bothered him. And-- he-- he-- he regretted having to help plan attacks against Americans. But because these were, in the end, attacks against Jews and Israelis, it was something that he felt he had to do.

BRIAN ROSS:

So there was no attempt on his part to deny involvement?

JOHN:

Oh, no, not at all. Not at all. He was quite open.

BRIAN ROSS:

And did he talk about 9/11?

JOHN:

Yeah. He said that-- that 9/11 was necessary. That although he didn't think that-- there would be such a massive loss of life, his view was that 9/11th-- 9/11, rather, was supposed to be a wake-up call-- to the United States. It wasn't supposed to be something that so shook the United States that it led the US to attack-- al Qaeda's bases in Afghanistan.

In previous attacks, the USS Cole, the embassy bombings in-- in East Africa, the US government responded with missile strikes against alleged al Qaeda sites. And they truly believed that that's

how we were gonna respond to September 11th. They didn't think that there would be an all-out attack.

BRIAN ROSS:

So they didn't anticipate the death toll being so-- large?

JOHN:

They didn't. They didn't think the buildings would collapse.

BRIAN ROSS:

And--

JOHN:

That's been told me.

BRIAN ROSS:

As you began to talk to him-- was time of the essence? Did you feel you had to get him to talk?

JOHN:

Yes. Because in the beginning, while, like I say, he was friendly-- and he was willing to talk about philosophy, he was unwilling to give us any-- any actionable intelligence.

BRIAN ROSS:

And what in your mind was your way you were gonna get him to give that up?

JOHN:

We had a group of folks-- at the agency who were trained in-- what had been reported in the press, we called enhanced techniques. I came back to the-- to the United States to headquarters to move onto a different job. But we had these trained interrogators who were sent to his location-- to use the enhanced techniques as necessary to get him to open up-- and to report some threat information.

BRIAN ROSS:

And can you describe them?

JOHN:

In-- in generalities. I suppose I can say that-- that my understanding is that what's been reported in the press-- has been correct in that these enhanced techniques included everything from-- what was called an attention shake where you grab the person by their lapels and shape

them. All the way up to the other end, which was water boarding.

BRIAN ROSS:

And that was one of the techniques.

JOHN:

Water boarding was one of the techniques, yes.

BRIAN ROSS:

And was it used on Zubaydah?

JOHN:

It was.

BRIAN ROSS:

And was it successful?

JOHN:

It was.

BRIAN ROSS:

What happened as a result of that?

JOHN:

He resisted. He was able to withstand the water boarding for quite some time. And by that I mean probably 30, 35 seconds--

BRIAN ROSS:

That's quite some time.

JOHN:

--which was quite some time. And a short time afterwards, in the next day or so, he told his interrogator that Allah had visit him in his cell during the night and told him to cooperate because his cooperation would make it easier on the other brothers who had been captured. And from that day on he answered every question just like I'm sitting here speaking to you.

BRIAN ROSS:

And a willing way?

JOHN:

In a willing way.

BRIAN ROSS:

So in your view the water boarding broke him.

JOHN:

I think it did, yes.

BRIAN ROSS:

And did it make a difference in terms of--

JOHN:

It did. The threat information that he provided disrupted a number of attacks, maybe dozens of

attacks.

BRIAN ROSS:

No doubt about that? That's not some--

JOHN:

No doubt.

BRIAN ROSS:

--hype?

JOHN:

No, no question. No question. The reporting-- I remember reading the reporting, and it was dramatic when it first started coming in. Now, of course, a lot of that was time-sensitive. So after a period of time he wasn't to-- to provide any real actionable information, any information that you could use to disrupt an attack.

But what he was able to provide was information on the al Qaeda leadership. For example-- if bin Laden were to do X-- who would be the person to undertake such a-- such an operation? "Oh, logically that would be Mr. Y." And we were able to use that information to kind of get an idea of

how al Qaeda operated, how it came about conceptualizing its operations, and-- and how it went about tasking different cells with carrying out operations.

BRIAN ROSS:

And in terms of the actual planned future attacks?

JOHN:

Yeah, we disrupted a lot of them.

BRIAN ROSS:

And he knew about them?

JOHN:

He knew about some. But like I say, it was time-sensitive information. So that-- that wound down over time.

BRIAN ROSS:

And the ones that he knew about, were they on US soil? Were they in Pakistan?

JOHN:

You know, I was out of it by then. I had moved onto a new job. And I-- I don't recall. To the best of my recollection, no, they weren't on US

soil. They were overseas.

BRIAN ROSS:

The fact that the-- interrogation techniques had to go all the way to water boarding, that meant he resisted the steps on the way to that? We've reported--

JOHN:

Yes.

BRIAN ROSS:

--the attention slap--

JOHN:

Yes.

BRIAN ROSS:

--sleep deprivation?

JOHN:

Correct. And I should add too that it wasn't up to individual interrogators to decide, "Well, I'm gonna slap him. Or I'm going to shake him. Or I'm gonna make him stay up for 48 hours." Each one of these steps, even though they're minor steps, like the intention shake-- or the open-handed belly slap, each one of these had to have

the approval of the Deputy Director for Operations.

So before you laid a hand on him, you had to send in the cable saying, "He's uncooperative. Request permission to do X." And that permission would come. "You're allowed to him one time in the belly with an open hand."

BRIAN ROSS:

It was that specific.

JOHN:

It was that specific.

BRIAN ROSS:

Cable traffic back and forth.

JOHN:

The cable traffic back and forth was extremely specific. And the bottom line was these were very unusual authorities that the agency got after 9/11. No one wanted to mess them up. No one wanted to get in trouble by going overboard. So it was extremely deliberate.

No one wanted to be the guy that accidentally did lasting damage to a prisoner. Or did something to a prisoner without authorization. It was very clear from the beginning that this had to be done within the rules.

BRIAN ROSS:

Was there concern that it might kill him?

JOHN:

No. No. There was a doctor there. And none of these-- none of these techniques, including water boarding, was life-threatening. An open-handed slap to the belly or to the cheek-- wasn't going to-- wasn't gonna kill him.

BRIAN ROSS:

Was there concern that-- the techniques would result in false confessions? He would just say something?

JOHN:

Oh, there was always that concern.

BRIAN ROSS:

And how do you guard against that?

JOHN:

Well, the only way that you really can at least partially guard against that is to not do these things regularly. That's why so few people were-- were water boarded. I think the agency has said that two people were water boarded, Abu Zubaydah being one. And it's because you really wanted it to be a last resort. Because we didn't want these false confessions. We didn't want wild goose chases.

One of the things that we were able to do after a while so that you wouldn't have to water board people is in the beginning these prisoners were kept isolated from one another. And one didn't know that the other had been captured. So walking one past another's cell and just allowing them to catch a glimpse of one another was enough to shake them up-- enough that they-- that they would begin cooperating without you having to use any of these enhanced techniques.

BRIAN ROSS:

Just to see that one of his colleagues had been caught.

JOHN:

That's right. And if you allow them to believe that, look, you've lost. The good guys won. You're all in jail. That was enough to really turn the tables.

BRIAN ROSS:

In the case of Abu Zubaydah did you feel that he was broken emotionally? That he had felt he'd lost the battle?

JOHN:

Yes. Yes, I think he did feel that way. And in the end it's funny. A-- a-- a former colleague of mine asked him during the conversation one day, "What would you do if we decided to let you go one day?" And he said, "I would kill every American and Jew I could get my hands on." And he said, "It's nothing personal. You're a nice guy. But this is who I am."

BRIAN ROSS:

Did you feel comfortable with the techniques?

JOHN:

Frankly, no. And I elected to-- to forego the training. I was asked if I wanted to be trained in the enhanced techniques. And I sought the counsel of a senior agency officer who's still an agency officer. And I said, "What would you do in my situation?" And he said, "Frankly, I think it's a slippery slope. An accident's gonna happen. And-- I wouldn't do it." And so I declined.

BRIAN ROSS:

So you did not go through the training?

JOHN:

I did not.

BRIAN ROSS:

Have you seen water boarding?

JOHN:

We water boarded each other in the beginning to see what it felt like. And it's a-- it's a wholly unpleasant experience.

BRIAN ROSS:

What is it like?

JOHN:

You feel like you're choking or drowning.

BRIAN ROSS:

And are you literally upside down? Or--

JOHN:

You're on your back with-- your feet at a slight incline. There's some cellophane or material over your mouth. And then they pour water on this cellophane. You can't breathe. And it feels like the water's going down your throat. And then you begin choking it. It-- induces the gag reflex.

BRIAN ROSS:

But the water's not actually going into your mouth?

JOHN:

No.

BRIAN ROSS:

Or through your nostrils?

JOHN:

No.

BRIAN ROSS:

(UNINTEL)

JOHN:

It just feels like it is.

BRIAN ROSS:

It feels like it is 'cause of the pressure onto the-- onto the cellophane.

JOHN:

Correct.

BRIAN ROSS:

Like a Saran wrap kind of thing.

JOHN:

That's right.

BRIAN ROSS:

And how long did you last?

JOHN:

(LAUGHS) About five seconds. (LAUGHS)

BRIAN ROSS:

(UNINTEL) Is-- would you--

JOHN:

Yeah.

BRIAN ROSS:

--call it torture?

JOHN:

You know, at the time, no. At the time I thought this was something that we-- we really needed to do. I had heard stories of-- of captured German prisoners from the Second World War playing chess with their interrogators. And over the course of many weeks and months of playing chess they develop a rapport, and the German ended up giving information. Al Qaeda is not like a World War Two German POW. It's a different world.

These guys hate us more than they love life. And so they're not-- you're not gonna convince them that because you're a nice guy and they can trust you and they have a rapport with you that they're going to confess and-- and give you their operations. It's-- it's different. It's a different world.

BRIAN ROSS:

You're not-- you're not gonna be able to slowly seduce them to talk?

JOHN:

Not these guys. And at the time I-- I felt that water boarding was something that we needed to do. And as time has passed, and has-- as September 11th has-- has, you know, has moved farther and farther back into history-- I think I've changed my mind. And I think that-- water boarding is probably something that we shouldn't be in the business of doing.

BRIAN ROSS:

Why do you say that now?

JOHN:

Because we're Americans, and we're better than that.

BRIAN ROSS:

But at the time you didn't feel that way.

JOHN:

At the time I was so angry. And I wanted so much to help disrupt future attacks on the United

States that I felt it was the only thing we could do.

BRIAN ROSS:

And with Zubaydah you think that was successful.

JOHN:

It was.

BRIAN ROSS:

And we have reported that Kaleed (PH) Shiek Muhammad was also water boarded.

JOHN:

I was out of it by then. But it's my understanding that he was-- that he was also water boarded.

BRIAN ROSS:

But those are really the only two.

JOHN:

To the best of my knowledge, yes.

BRIAN ROSS:

And bottom line as you sit here now do you think that was worth it?

JOHN:

Yes.

BRIAN ROSS:

Did it compromise American principles? Or did it save American lives? Or both?

JOHN:

It-- it-- I think both. It may have compromised our principles at least in the short term. And I think it's good that we're having a national debate about this. We should be debating this. And Congress should be talking about it. Because I think as a country we have to decide if this is something that we wanna do as a matter of policy. I'm not saying now that we should. But at the very least we should be talking about it. It shouldn't be secret. It should be out there as part of the national debate.

BRIAN ROSS:

It's been revealed now that the CIA had tapes of the interrogation underway. Were you involved in the taping process?

JOHN:

No. In fact, I first learned about it in the press yesterday.

BRIAN ROSS:

Do-- you were not-- you did not see cameras?

JOHN:

We had cameras everywhere. But it was our understanding at the time that they were closed circuit cameras so that other interrogators and medical personnel and security officers could watch the interviews-- taking place.

BRIAN ROSS:

You didn't see it being recorded anywhere?

JOHN:

No. No, I never saw it being recorded.

BRIAN ROSS:

And now that you know it was recorded and the tapes were destroyed afterwards what do you make of that?

JOHN:

I'm disappointed frankly. I understand that the agency's explanation was they wanted to make sure that everything was being done legally and within the-- the guidelines that-- that the organization had set forth. But it makes me wonder instead if

they simply didn't trust the interrogators. And if they wanted to catch somebody doing something that was unauthorized. So frankly, I'm a little disappointed that they didn't have that trust in us having already been polygraphed, having undergone-- not me, but other interrogators having undergone-- the training, they still didn't trust us enough to-- to let us just do-- do our jobs.

BRIAN ROSS:

You never saw tapes coming out of the machine or--

JOHN:

No.

BRIAN ROSS:

--being sent off to Washington?

JOHN:

No, never saw tapes.

BRIAN ROSS:

And never reviewed them when you were back in Washington?

JOHN:

No, never heard about them even.

BRIAN ROSS:

Really? So they were very closely held.

JOHN:

Very closely held.

BRIAN ROSS:

Should they have been destroyed do you think?

JOHN:

I think not. I think they're a matter of-- of historical record at least within the agency. They may have-- some legal import. And they probably should not have been destroyed.

BRIAN ROSS:

If we were able to look at those tapes of Abu Zubaydah what would we see?

JOHN:

I think you'll see a lot of very long and very boring conversations about the minutiae surrounding the leadership of al Qaeda. I think you'll see a couple of incidents where-- at least in the beginning where he was-- very tough. And-

- uncooperative. And then the rest of it I think you'll see just a lot of open conversations.

BRIAN ROSS:

Will you see him being slapped?

JOHN:

You know, I have no idea if that kind of thing was-- was taped. I would assume that it was. So you might-- you might see something like that.

BRIAN ROSS:

If they taped the enhanced interrogation we would see what?

JOHN:

Oh, an open-handed belly slap maybe. Or somebody who's very tired because he's been up for 48 hours and not allowed to sit down. But not much more than that.

BRIAN ROSS:

Kept him standing for 48 hours?

JOHN:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM)

BRIAN ROSS:

And do you suppose they taped the water boarding?

JOHN:

Gosh-- you-- I honestly don't know. I don't know.

BRIAN ROSS:

If-- the American public was to see somebody, even Abu Zubaydah, being water boarded what would you guess would--

JOHN:

I think it would be objectionable. It-- it's-- it's sort of a violent thing to-- to see or to go through. You may be of, you know, one persuasion or the other where you think it's a necessary thing or-- or you think it's torture. But either way you dice it-- it-- it's not something that's pretty to watch.

BRIAN ROSS:

How does the body react?

JOHN:

Violently.

BRIAN ROSS:

How so?

JOHN:

To me it's almost like being shocked. Where you tense up because you wanna-- you wanna wiggle out of the way of the water, and you can't, because you're strapped down. And-- and your head is immobilized. And you just have to lay there and take it until the interrogator stops pouring water on you.

BRIAN ROSS:

And the water's poured. And you have a kind of gag--

JOHN:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM)

BRIAN ROSS:

And you're just gagging.

JOHN:

Yes, you're gagging. Correct.

BRIAN ROSS:

Shouting? Or you can't-- can you do it?

JOHN:

Sure. Sure.

BRIAN ROSS:

And was Zubaydah that was really only 35, 40 seconds that--

JOHN:

Which was remarkable at the time. Because none of us were able to withstand more than ten seconds worth, ten or 12 seconds. He was quite tough I recall.

BRIAN ROSS:

And you think that's what broke him though.

JOHN:

I do. I do. I think he just didn't wanna go through it again. And if the alternative is just sitting at the table across from a guy with a notepad and answering his questions, it's better just to answer the questions.

BRIAN ROSS:

And he decided to do that.

JOHN:

Yes.

BRIAN ROSS:

And was that considered a victory inside the CIA?

JOHN:

A big victory. Because once the information started coming in and we were able to corroborate it with other sources-- and able to-- to-- disrupt other operations, al Qaeda operations or terrorist attacks, that was a big victory.

BRIAN ROSS:

And who else was present at the interrogation?

JOHN:

There were always several interrogators.

BRIAN ROSS:

C-- all CIA.

JOHN:

All CIA. There was a doctor. And--

BRIAN ROSS:

A CIA doctor?

JOHN:

CIA doctor. And then once in a while there would be-- a substantive expert, like an analyst who was there to ask the questions, somebody who really understood the-- the details of what needed to be asked, who was there and just

happened to be around and asked to-- to stand in.

BRIAN ROSS:

Were there FBI agents present at all?

JOHN:

It's my understanding that later on in the process, after I had moved on, that FBI agents participated as well.

BRIAN ROSS:

We--

JOHN:

Not necessarily in the water boarding. But in the interrogations.

BRIAN ROSS:

We have reports that-- the Director of the FBI instructed the agents not to be involved in any--

JOHN:

I-- I'm sure that's true.

BRIAN ROSS:

--interrogation.

JOHN:

I'm sure that's true. Those authorities that came from the White House to-- to do the-- the

enhanced techniques were solely for the CIA, not for the-- not for the FBI. So it-- it would make perfect sense to me that the FBI Director wouldn't want FBI personnel around.

BRIAN ROSS:

And did you know the CIA officers feel without a doubt you had the legal right to do what you were doing?

JOHN:

Absolutely. Absolutely. I remember-- I remember being told when-- the President signed the-- the authorities that they had been approved-- not just by the National Security Counsel, but by the-- but by the Justice Department as well, I remember people being surprised that the authorities were granted. And I remember-- one of the agency's senior-most leaders saying, "This is-- this is an awesome responsibility, that we have to act within the confines of the law. This isn't gonna be something that's being done willy-nilly, that people are gonna be trained in it. And we have to follow this to the letter."

BRIAN ROSS:

And that was done in what you saw?

JOHN:

That was done. Yes. People were very, very concerned at the time about making sure that-- that no one overdid it, or no one overstepped the-- the legal authorities. People were very concerned.

BRIAN ROSS:

So when the decision was made to first do the slap of Abu Zubaydah the permission for that came specifically from Washington?

JOHN:

Yes. Absolutely.

BRIAN ROSS:

That--

JOHN:

There was discussion. It wasn't just a cable came in, "Can I slap him?" and the answer is "Yes," and the cable goes back out saying, "Yes." There was discussion. "Should we slap him? What's to be gained if we slap him? Is there

gonna be any fallout to slapping him?"

Everybody talks about it. The Deputy Director for Operations says, "Yes, you can slap him." The cable goes out. They slap him. Send in a cable again saying, "We slapped him, and this is what happened." And if that works, great. If that doesn't work, well, maybe we shake him by the lapels the next time. And you go through the whole process again.

BRIAN ROSS:

And it got to the point where you got to sleep deprivation. He was standing up for how long?

JOHN:

You know, I used that as a an example.

BRIAN ROSS:

Yeah.

JOHN:

But I'm-- I'm not sure, to be honest with you, if they did the sleep deprivation with him.

BRIAN ROSS:

I see.

JOHN:

I-- I-- I don't specifically remember that being used on him. Although it was one of the enhanced techniques. It's possible. You know, it's five-and-a-half years after the fact now. It's possible that-- that that was skipped over in favor of water boarding.

BRIAN ROSS:

So you didn't have to go through every step.

JOHN:

No.

BRIAN ROSS:

If there was a time-sensitive you could-- you could go right to it.

JOHN:

That's right.

BRIAN ROSS:

And when the sleep deprivation was used on others-- was that effective?

JOHN:

It was effective. It was effective.

BRIAN ROSS:

Why-- why is that so effective?

JOHN:

You know, you may not think about it, but-- but exhaustion is-- is a very difficult thing to handle. It's one thing to be tired. It's another thing to be so tired that you begin to hallucinate. And after a while some people just can't take it anymore. And they'll tell you if-- "Just give me an hour. Give me two hours of sleep, I'll tell you anything you wanna know."

BRIAN ROSS:

Really?

JOHN:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM)

BRIAN ROSS:

And that's after how long generally?

JOHN:

I recall the handful of times it was used on people it was usually 40 hours plus. They just simply couldn't take it anymore.

BRIAN ROSS:

And be standing this whole time?

JOHN:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM)

BRIAN ROSS:

Falling over? Trying to--

JOHN:

And you do things like you play music. You talk to them. You make them walk around so they-- they can't get comfortable.

BRIAN ROSS:

After Zubaydah was interrogated and really gave up all he knew, at least you-- all you thought he knew about the current operations, what was his value then?

JOHN:

His value was-- it allowed us to have somebody who we could pass ideas onto for his-- for his-- comments or analysis. For example, we would say things like-- "Mr. X was arrested in some European capital. And the Europeans think he was going to undertake such-and-such an operation.

Would he be the person to do something like that?"

And Abu Zubaydah would say something like, "Yes, he's the perfect person." Or-- or, "Yes, he had a-- he had a specialty in bomb-making, let's say, or in weapons or in fake documents." Or conversely, he would say, "No, that doesn't make any sense. He didn't have any experience in that area. Or you should be looking at this other person. This other person had experience in that area." So it was someone really to bounce ideas off of.

BRIAN ROSS:

He became a-- a resource in a sense in sort of like a-- a double check?

JOHN:

Yes.

BRIAN ROSS:

And you-- you used him a lot like that.

JOHN:

Yes, we did. We used him a lot.

BRIAN ROSS:

And at that point was he completely cooperative?

JOHN:

Completely cooperative.

BRIAN ROSS:

But still hating the United States.

JOHN:

Yes. But like he said, it was nothing personal. (LAUGHTER) He's a Muslim and a Palestinian. He's dedicated his life to the overthrow of-- of Israel, of the end of the existence of Israel. The United States is on the-- is on the side of Israel. And it's nothing personal. But there's a war on. And he's on the other side.

BRIAN ROSS:

And what happened to him? The initial interrogation was done in Pakistan?

JOHN:

No. He was-- he was in such terrible physical condition in Pakistan that aside from a one- or two-minute conversation that we would have every four or five hours, which was really about

nothing-- he-- he was-- interviewed in-- in the-- the third country that he moved onto from there.

BRIAN ROSS:

And how long--

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

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ABC NEWS

"CIA - ABU ZUBAYDAH"

INTERVIEW WITH JOHN KIRIAKOU

CORRESPONDENT: BRIAN ROSS

MEDIA ID: TAPE #2

JOHN:

(IN PROGRESS) It-- it-- we didn't go after him because he was Abu Zubaydah. We went after him because he just happened to be in Pakistan and we thought there was a chance we could catch him.

BRIAN ROSS:

And did he know where bin Laden was?

JOHN:

No. No idea. Hadn't seen bin Laden in six months. Hadn't spoken to him in four months, didn't have any idea.

BRIAN ROSS:

And how about-- Kalid Sheik Mohammed (PH)? Did he have a sense of him?

JOHN:

I was already gone by then. But my-- my guess is

no. They're very stove piped, very compartmentalized. They're-- almost no one knows where anyone else is. They have this system of couriers that they use to communicate. They're never on the-- they're never on the phone. They-- it's-- they're-- they're real pros.

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

BRIAN ROSS:

And-- but he continued to be and continues to be a resource?

JOHN:

I've been outta the agency for awhile now, for almost four years now. When-- when I left, he-- he was still a good resource to go to.

BRIAN ROSS:

And people were valuing what he said?

JOHN:

They were.

BRIAN ROSS:

Was he ever caught in a lie?

JOHN:

No.

BRIAN ROSS:

An exaggeration?

JOHN:

No. And we-- we really ran down everything that he said. Obviously, there are other sources to-- to corroborate-- things. And this is one way that you're able to vet the people that you're speaking with. And to the best of my recollection, he never led us down the wrong path.

BRIAN ROSS:

Were there any other-- tricks of the trade that you used to try to get him to talk?

JOHN:

No. That was it. It was pretty straightforward. And the reason why we didn't use other tricks of the trade is because those-- those tricks of the trade require a great deal of time-- much of the time. And we didn't have that luxury. We were afraid that there was another major attack coming.

We were afraid that there would be an attack on U.S. soil. And we felt that we really needed to get to the bottom of what he knew quickly so we could disrupt those-- those possible attacks.

BRIAN ROSS:

And were those fears realized? You think there was, in fact, another major attack--

(OVERTALK)

JOHN:

I do. I think al-Qaeda is always planning

another major attack. I think that this is an ongoing battle that we're gonna be fighting for the next generation, at least. And it's always going to be a game of one-upmanship. We always have to have information that is at least as good as what they're planning. It's the only way that we can-- that we can stop these attacks.

BRIAN ROSS:

But given that you felt that-- water-boarding (?) and the enhanced interrogation broke him, if you-- if somebody else was caught today, wouldn't you wanna use those same techniques?

JOHN:

I think that I would be very tempted to use the same techniques. I--

BRIAN ROSS:

In other words, in your view, they-- they do work?

JOHN:

I-- yes, they do work.

BRIAN ROSS:

No doubt about that?

JOHN:

But like a lot of Americans, I think I-- I'm involved in this-- this internal, intellectual battle with myself weighing the idea that water-boarding may be torture, versus the quality of information that we-- that we often get after using the water-boarding technique. And I struggle with it, I think like a lot of people do, where like I said earlier, we're Americans and we're better than this. And we shouldn't be doing this kinda thing.

But at the same time, what happens if we don't water-board a person and we don't get that nugget of information, and there's an attack on a-- on a movie theater or a shopping mall or-- or in midtown Manhattan, you know, at rush hour? Then-- then what do we do? I-- I would have trouble forgiving myself.

BRIAN ROSS:

We've reported that the director of the CIA-- Michael Hayden (PH), has banned water-boarding at

least for now.

JOHN:

Yes.

BRIAN ROSS:

Hasn't been used.

JOHN:

Yes.

BRIAN ROSS:

And maybe since-- Kalid Sheik Mohammed. Did he make the right decision, do you think?

JOHN:

I think he probably did. I-- I think--

BRIAN ROSS:

I don't think it's permanently banned. But for the moment, it is.

JOHN:

For the moment, it is. I think that we've-- we've gotten up and running-- to the-- to the extent that we're-- we have enough information coming in from an-- enough different kinds of sources that we do have a handle on-- on al-Qaeda operations as they're being planned, at least

right now. And that water-boarding is unnecessary.

You know, the-- the months after September 11th were different. Because we were-- we were really reactive at the time. And we were-- we were stunned by the-- by the magnitude of-- of the attacks on September 11th. And we were afraid that something of-- of equal-- scope was-- was in the works.

And we were really trying to do anything that we could to stop another major attack from happening. I don't think we're in that mindset right now. I think we're chasing them all over the world. I think we've had a great deal of success chasing them, not just by ourselves but with other-- with other governments. And-- as a result, water-boarding, at least right now, is unnecessary.

BRIAN ROSS:

And it's your view that al-Qaeda has been foiled,

that it wasn't because they couldn't do it again but because--

JOHN:

I think we--

BRIAN ROSS:

--you think it's by the U.S. and others stopped them--

JOHN:

--we've disrupted them, yes. There are hundreds and hundreds of patriotic Americans working for very little money with no vacation and no sleep and no time with their families, working in horrible parts of the world just to make sure that another attack doesn't occur.

BRIAN ROSS:

Why did you leave the CIA? Were you upset with yourself, what you did?

JOHN:

No. I loved the CIA. I still love the CIA. But I'm a middle-aged guy. I have four children. And I wanted to spend more time with my family. And I thought that, you know, there-- there's

more to life than just running to the four corners of the earth on six hours' notice to meet some terrorist. And-- I just wanted to spend more time at home.

BRIAN ROSS:

Very good then. Thank you very much.

JOHN:

Thank you for having me.

BRIAN ROSS:

Anything else you wanna say or you think is important?

JOHN:

I wish you the best of luck in this. This is--

BRIAN ROSS:

Okay.

JOHN:

--an important story.

BRIAN ROSS:

Okay.

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

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